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Jan 1st, 12:00 AM

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Nam, Changhyun; Son, Jihyeong; and Yu, Jeagu, "The Impact of Body Satisfaction on Fitness Apparel Online Shopping According to Culture" (2018). *International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) Annual Conference Proceedings*. 81.

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The Impact of Body Satisfaction on Fitness Apparel Online Shopping According to Culture

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Keywords: body satisfaction, fitness apparel, cross-culture, online shopping

The global fitness apparel market (e.g., yoga pants, bike shirts) has been growing as consumers' attention to physical fitness exercises, their body shape and size, and well-being trends. However, international fitness wear clothing is still hindered by cross-cultural marker variations, due to international consumers' different viewpoint or recognition of a preferred and socially acceptable body image, as the ideal body image -- weight, height, and shape of the body and muscles -- differs from culture to culture (Cash & Henry, 1995).

Social capital, referring to resources that can be accessed through social ties and generated in social network interactions, affects the development and maintenance of body image, and reinforces cultural ideas of beauty and body shape (Cohen et al., 2017) in social media and individuals' body satisfaction. For example, young adults share concerns and ideals of their body images and resources for how to maintain fitness via interactions on social media (e.g., Facebook and Instagram). Then, perceptions of individuals' body satisfaction impact on their apparel consumption. Based on social interactions in social media, brands have improved their communication and shared social capital (e.g., bonding, bridging) with consumers, and increased sales in e-commerce. Also, perceived e-service quality (e.g., websites design, trust, reliability, responsiveness) facilitates these interactions and attitude towards online shopping (Al-Debei et al., 2015). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine how young consumers' perceived body satisfaction or dissatisfaction affects fitness wear consumption differently according to culture. There would be differences in the perception either body dissatisfied or satisfied students in the United States and South Korea, which have the large active active social network sites and apparel online shopping in Western and Eastern cultures.

For this study, a total of 1,144 college students were recruited from a large southeast university in the United States (N = 607) and three large universities in South Korean (N = 537). Participants completed a survey asking: (a) demographics; (b) cognitive attitude toward body size for measuring body satisfaction; (c) features of fitness apparel; (d) social capital-bonding and bridging; (e) perceived e-service quality – web design and responsiveness; (f) brand consciousness; and (g) purchase intentions toward fitness apparel.

To profile the participants by their perceived body image, first, discriminant analysis was used for generating four clusters (body satisfaction x culture): body satisfaction ($N_{us} = 337$; $N_{Korean} = 396$) and dissatisfaction ($N_{us} = 270$; $N_{Korean} = 141$). Second, confirmatory factor analysis

was conducted to analyze the overall factor structure and construct validity of the scales and revealed good model fit ($\chi^2 = 23.8$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.051, SRMR = 0.025). Finally, MANOVA was conducted to determine the extent to which variables varied among the four identified clusters ($p < 0.05$).

Participants in the United States and South Korea who were dissatisfied with their body shape wanted to lose weight ($F = 2705.6$, $p < 0.001$). Interestingly, both U.S. female (76%) and Korean male students (50.4%) were more dissatisfied with their bodies than U.S. male (24%) and Korean female students (49.6%) from the both cultures ($\chi^2 = 86.9$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.001$). The results of the chi-square analyses showed that both students are significantly satisfied with features (size, function, brand, price, quality, fashion trend, and color) of fitness apparel ($\chi^2 = 123.44$, $df = 21$, $p < 0.05$). In the United States, when purchasing fitness apparel via web-based shopping, body-satisfied students had concerns regarding the function of the product ($N = 83$), while body-dissatisfied students considered the quality ($N = 72$) of the fitness apparel. In South Korea, body-satisfied students were concerned with quality ($N = 89$), while body-dissatisfied students considered the function ($N = 40$) of the fitness apparel. Thus, perceptions of fitness apparel were influenced by body satisfaction or dissatisfaction and cross-cultural aspects. Six variables of the measurement showed statistically significant differences among body factors and across cultures: social bridging ($F = 15.36$); social bonding ($F = 46.08$); web responsiveness ($F = 53.80$); web design ($F = 153.77$); brand consciousness ($F = 5.52$); and purchase intentions ($F = 90.34$). In general, body-dissatisfied students in both countries had higher mean scores for each variable, indicating more negative purchase intentions toward fitness apparel than body-satisfied students.

The findings demonstrated both U.S. and Korean students are significant different in their designations of being satisfied with their bodies. The results of this study also indicated that different body perceptions and cultures are related to the key features (i.e., function and quality) of fitness apparel and impact purchase intentions toward fitness apparel online shopping. Therefore, the study could provide marketing strategies to the global fitness or sports apparel industry as segmentation approaches about body satisfaction, fitness apparel consumption, and cultures. It is imperative for marketers and e-tailers to identify marketing strategies that have the potential to properly impact consumers' body shape and features of fitness apparel in their websites. Further research could be conducted using structural equation modeling with a conceptual model using these variables by across cultural comparisons.

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